

**Thomas Jefferson to Congress, March 17, 1808, from  
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**SPECIAL MESSAGE ON COMMERCIAL DECREES**

March 17, 1808.

*To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States:—*

I have heretofore communicated to Congress the decrees of the government of France of November 21st, 1806, and of Spain, February 19th, 1807, with the orders of the British government, of January and November, 1807.

I now transmit a decree of the Emperor of France, of December 17th, 1807, and a similar decree of the 3d January last, by his Catholic Majesty. Although the decree of France has not been received by official communication, yet the different channels of promulgation through which the public are possessed of it, with the formal testimony furnished by the government of Spain, in their decree, leave us without a doubt that such a one has been issued. These decrees and orders, taken together, want little of amounting to a declaration that every neutral vessel found on the high seas, whatsoever be her cargo, and whatsoever foreign port be that of her departure or destination, shall be deemed lawful prize; and they prove, more and more, the expediency of retaining our vessels, our seamen, and property, within our own harbors, until the dangers to which they are exposed can be removed or lessened.